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ABSTRACT

The planning and implementation of a summer workshop in American literature of minority groups for a small denominational college is described in this paper. Four teachers provided through the National American Studies Faculty conducted week-long seminars on the literature of Blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos, and Asian Americans. An additional benefit of the course was the inclusion of other forms of ethnic art as topics of study. In conjunction with the daily classes, a public lecture held one evening a week was provided for class members, other students, faculty, and other interested community members. Although enrollment in the workshop was small, evaluation of the program was generally favorable. Special strengths included the development of reading lists, suggestions for non-book materials, efficient utilization of specialists in each area of minority literature, and good class discussions. (KS)

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PLANNING AND EXECUTING A SUMMER WORKSHOP IN AMERICAN LITERATURE OF MINORITY GROUPS

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PLANNING AND EXECUTING A SUMMER
WORKSHOP IN AMERICAN LITERATURE OF
MINORITY GROUPS

"Did she say to write a 'How to . . .' paper this time? Well, it's not surprising. She's thought of every other kind. Maybe this one won't be so bad. Surely there must be something I know how to do and how to explain in logical progression.

"What's this she's saying now? She's going to write a 'How to . . .' paper too. Any teacher of writing ought to try writing some of the things she assigns! Now here's a novel idea from her. Maybe she'll see how hard some of the ideas she comes up with really are to write about."

So go the thoughts in the mind of a student in a writing class, and also go the thoughts of her instructor who really must compose a paper entitled "How to Plan and Finance a Workshop on American Literature of Minority Groups." The instructor insists that the progression must be orderly in order to be logical. So the genesis of such a workshop must be the first step in describing it.

In the summer of 1974 a catalogue entitled New from NCTE arrived, and the items most interesting to me were books, brochures, and other education media concerning minority groups and their contributions to American Literature. When one teaches at a small denominational school with meager financial support, one is always looking for that unique program that will draw participants to her school. But an absolute necessity for any program at my school is that it be academically sound. I knew immediately that a course in American Literature of Minority Groups was both unique for the area and academically sound. So I could begin to put feet and wings to my thoughts.

I had a number of minority groups to choose from; but with the help of the NCTE catalogue, I settled on Black Literature, Native American Literature, Chicano Literature, and Asian American Literature. I felt that the students preparing to teach and teachers already in the schools would find these choices helpful in their present American Literature courses and in the popular mini-courses being offered in many schools.

Now with the idea and with a basic selection of subject matter, I had to get down to the chore of seeing this come into being. I knew that what I wanted to do would cost money because I was not going to settle for a mediocre workshop. We would have to import the leaders of what I now envisioned to be four one-week sessions, each week being devoted to the literature of one minority. We had on our faculty one person who could handle the Black Literature and another person who was quite knowledgeable about Indian affairs but lacking expertise in the literature. Still I felt that we would do well to have off-campus leaders if possible. Although I knew the idea would meet with overwhelming approval, I also knew that I would be told that there was no money for extra faculty. The Summer Program on our campus is no great moneymaker, and my "brainchild" could suddenly put the program into the undesirable state of deficit financing—a state that would be strictly forbidden.

As I expected, the workshop got quick and enthusiastic blessing from both the department chairman and the academic dean; and as I also expected, the immediate question of how we were to pay for it was asked. By this time it was mid-September, and deadlines for funding were past or upon us.

The National Endowment for the Humanities seemed the best bet as a starting place to look for funds. I called Richard Ekman at the Endowment.

He listened to a very brief description of the program idea. Then he said that the Endowment was funding four regional programs of this type and could not consider a small program like ours. But he did not shut the door in my face. Rather he said that the National American Studies Faculty with headquarters at Stetson University under the direction of Dr. John Hague might be able to furnish us with the faculty we needed at little or no expense.

At this point I confess my ignorance. I had never heard of the National American Studies Faculty. However, as soon as I reached John Hague by telephone, it became apparent that I had found a person genuinely interested in Columbia College's prospective program and also sympathetic with the problems a college like ours would have to overcome to support such a program.

He said our timing was excellent since the Board of Directors was meeting the next week. He said further that the proposal should reach him by the next Thursday, and his most encouraging comment at that time was that the proposal did not need to be a complicated proposal. All that was needed was a description of our program, and some indication of what Columbia College could contribute and of what we expected the National American Studies Faculty to contribute. Our proposal was put in order quickly and sent on for consideration.

About three weeks after the meeting of the Board, Dr. Hague called to say that they were going to help us to have the program by providing a specialist for each of the four weekly sessions. At this point our program took a slightly different direction. Dr. Hague wanted us to use a young woman whose expertise was in Women's Literature because this had been well received on other campuses. Since Women's Awareness had been emphasized on

our campus throughout the year, this change fitted well into an on-going program. We accepted his suggested change.

It was not long at all before Dr. Hague sent us the names of the workshop leaders and the dates available; then we could begin in earnest preparing the necessary publicity. Columbia College's main contribution in addition to the use of campus facilities was to handle all of the publicity for the program.

The Academic Dean gave me the go-ahead for an attractive printed brochure with pictures of the program leaders and other necessary information. Arrangements were also made with the Campus News Service for statewide newspaper and television publicity nearer the start of the summer program.

The brochures were ready by March 10, and they were distributed a number of different ways. First, Dr. Hague provided mailing labels for one hundred persons from the Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia area who were on his mailing list. Chairmen of the English departments of the colleges and universities in South Carolina received brochures as did the chairmen of the English departments at the eleven high schools in metropolitan Columbia. Brochures were also distributed to the English classes at Columbia College and to all of the Columbia College faculty. Several members of the English department took brochures to national and regional meetings for English teachers. We did not do a mass mailing—by this I mean in the thousands—since we planned to limit the enrollment to twenty-five participants.

Our program received a real boost in March when NCTE held a Spring Institute on Minority Literature in Columbia. I was fortunate to be a discussion leader at this institute. The interest in minority literature was evident in

the enthusiasm of all of those involved in the Institute. NCTE provided noted scholars from each ethnic group (Native American, Black, Chicano, and Asian American). These persons gave informative lectures and then participated in group discussions and in question-and-answer sessions following the group discussions. The favorable reception of this program reinforced my belief that such programs are vital to any who study and teach American Literature in order that the literary contributions of all Americans be included in the corpus of American Literature. There are, of course, other ethnic groups whose works are slowly being assimilated into American Literature. I feel certain that institutes and workshops that focus on Puerto Rican, Jewish, Polish, and other American literary productions would be received with interest.

A service provided by the on-campus coordinator (that was my title) was to order the books according to the directions of the workshop leaders. A list of the books used is available to any who would like to have one.

We offered the workshop leaders the opportunity to stay on our campus with room and board for the nominal charge of \$40.00 per person per week. Of course this charge was part of the remuneration of the National American Studies Faculty. It pleased me that the leaders did want to stay on the campus.

Persons supplied by the National American Studies Faculty are not paid a salary by the Faculty. Their expenses are paid and the Faculty supplies a small honorarium and requests the institution to do the same if it can. We were able to give these persons a \$100.00 honorarium for their services.

Columbia College's expenses for the workshop were, therefore, only \$400.00 for the honoraria, \$200.00 for the brochures, and approximately \$40.00 for postage. The small amount of secretarial help needed was furnished by the student assistants in the English department working at their regular times. The total expense for the four-week workshop ran less than \$700.00. My salary as coordinator was no added expense to the College since I would have been paid a salary for teaching one or two courses in the summer anyway.

Those attending the workshop paid \$160 for tuition and received four semester hours credit. The tuition offset some of the expense incurred by the College.

After nine months of preparation, it was time for the blessed event to arrive. (Yes, the figure of speech was intended.) Enrollment day and the first day of workshop were one and the same. The first workshop leader had come the day before. Thus all was in readiness.

It would not be proper in this paper to go into the personalities and individual approaches to each week's work; yet it is in order to say that each person provided by the National American Studies Faculty was a delightful person to have on campus for five days and was also an eminently qualified scholar in the chosen area. All of those who came had received their doctorates in the past five years or so. Certainly there is some risk involved when workshop leaders whose only identification is in a curriculum vita and some references. But our experience was a totally successful one insofar as program personnel were concerned.

The daily sessions were from 9:15 to 12:15. Each leader usually began the week's work with an overview of literary history and demonstrated

relationships with other minority literatures. When the ethnic literatures were being emphasized, the obvious omissions in American literature texts and courses were pointed out as was the paucity of knowledge and concern about these literatures arising from the literary traditions of groups which are really not insignificant in either population or artistic contributions.

Let me add a word of caution here. These workshop leaders were teachers of literature, and not social protesters. They did indeed "champion their causes," and rightly so, but never to the exclusion of good literary judgment.

They succeeded in making the class members (and I consider myself one of the class because I attended as much of every class session as possible) aware of many writers and pieces of literature that the students had little or no knowledge of. More than becoming aware, they began to appreciate the artistic value in these literatures.

An additional benefit especially evident in the ethnic studies was inclusion in the discussion of other forms of creative art produced by these ethnic groups. I cite as an example a particularly interesting discussion of the painting and sculpture of Mexican artists, Rivera, Ortega, and Siquieros. Another example was the use of some blues and jazz in association with Black literature.

Another most interesting addition was a well-done film entitled Broken Treaty at Battle Mountain. We could have used many other audio-visual aids had our budget provided. But the emphasis of the workshop was on literature, and the reading and discussion of the literary works were central to the objectives of the workshop.

The workshop offered four semester hours of undergraduate credit. The students could receive grades or could take the course Pass/Fail. Because a final grade was to be given, each workshop leader planned some sort of evaluative project for the final portion of the last class day. Two of the leaders gave essay questions to be written in the class period; one discussed with me the progress of the students involved in the week's work and arrived at a grade, and another had a class presentation by each member as a major determiner of the week's grade. Then the four grades were combined into a final course grade. There have been no adverse comments on the grading procedure, so it must have been satisfactory to the students because they had an opportunity to comment on class procedures.

Our small enrollment of ten was a disappointment to me and to the college administration after much hard work, but an error in planning the schedule was partially responsible. All other summer workshops were for a three-week period, and this one for four weeks caused some difficulty. Then, too, for some, the cost was prohibitive. Teachers can attend summer school at state institutions for little or no tuition, and for them a tuition fee was just too much. Had we been able to provide a stipend for teachers, I feel certain that more teachers would have come. Three of the ten enrollees were teachers in public or private schools; we had hoped for many more than this.

The workshop leaders and those that were enrolled saw the small enrollment as a distinct advantage. Yet the students often remarked how unfortunate it was that more were not getting the advantage of the program.

In addition to the daily class session, there was a public lecture

given each Tuesday evening. These were well attended—around thirty-five persons were there for each lecture. These included the students in the class and other students, Columbia faculty, staff, and their families, and interested persons in the community who had heard or read about the program.

Although I did not have written evaluations of the Tuesday sessions other than from the students in the class, people came to every session and expressed real appreciation for the excellence of the Tuesday night sessions.

In order to get a realistic picture of the value of the workshop, I elicited reactions from the workshop leaders and from the students. The workshop faculty responded favorable to the program and to the students when their portions of the workshop were complete. After they had had some time to think through the program, I asked them to write their evaluations. Three of the four responded. The general response was positive, but the respondents cited strengths and suggested ways that a good thing could be made better.

Strengths of the program indicated by the faculty evaluations were as follows:

1. Such a program might encourage more people to establish programs in ethnic literature.
2. The experience at Columbia College was completely enjoyable.
3. The experience at Columbia College was a learning experience for the instructors as well as for the students.
4. The small enrollment had distinct pedagogical advantages.

Suggestions for improvement indicated were as follows:

1. It might be better to use shorter works such as poems and plays rather than novels so that the class could focus more clearly on well-defined issues.
2. Each instructor might receive from the coordinator a suggested amount of reading material and some guidelines on the written

work expected. (I did suggest that a few poems and short stories, one novel, and one or two full-length plays might be all that could be covered each week. Even this might have been too much.)

3. It would be helpful if the students could have had a bibliography of the reading material before the classes began. (This was provided for several who requested such bibliographies. Then, too, some decided to take the course at registration on the very day the course began.)
4. Wider ranging publicity might have resulted in more minority students. (The publicity was very wide ranging. English department at every college in the state received brochures. Brochures were distributed at the NCTE Spring Institute on Minority Literature and at the South Carolina Council of Teachers Spring meeting. One hundred brochures were mailed to members of the American Studies Association in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. We also had excellent coverage on Columbia television stations and in the state's largest newspaper.)

The students also evaluated the program. An extremely simple evaluation form was used, and a copy is attached to this paper. The overall response was very positive. Each week's program was received favorably, indicating the abilities of the workshop leaders, both in their academic fields and in their handling of a workshop situation. Students cited strengths as follows: (These comments are unedited.)

1. There were good choices of leaders, excellent instructors, and a high quality of fantastically class sessions.
2. The historical backgrounds provided were most interesting.
3. Several of the works were magnificent; reading materials were generally very good.
4. The program was very well organized.
5. The program created an awareness of other ethnic groups, their lives, and their literature.
6. The program's discussion techniques were excellent.
7. No weaknesses were evident.

Students cited weaknesses as follows:

1. The program was too broad for the time period; there was too much material for the period of time.
2. A good reading list was needed for each group. (Some leaders did not have a list other than the week's basic reading prepared for distribution.)
3. Three weeks would have been enough; the fourth week was anti-climatic.

Suggestions for improvement cited were as follows:

1. More time was needed for in-depth study of material.
2. More time was needed to read the material.
3. More students should have taken advantage of the program.
4. A special workshop in each area would be valuable.

My personal evaluation is that the program was well planned and executed. I know of no other way, after our wide publication of the program, that we could have recruited more students unless we had subsidized their attendance. Perhaps our grant request should have included such a subsidy, but the need for such a workshop was unquestioned and I felt that our enrollment would be adequate. Need, however, does not always mean that people take advantage of opportunities especially when a large bit comes out of the pocketbook.

The quality of the program personnel was excellent. The only workshop leader not of the minority for which he or she led the discussion was the leader of the Native American literature group. His scholarship in Native American history, culture, and literature was of high quality. Having a person who was a Native American might (and I emphasize might) have been an advantage, but I am not at all sure that this would have proved true.

In addition to the academic and instructional abilities of these persons, each of them adapted very quickly to our small campus and became

a part of the community even for the short time they were here. We have stayed in contact with them since they left, a further indication of the pleasant relationship established. In other words, they gave far more of themselves than just holding a workshop session for three hours each day.

Since most of the leaders had some academic work to do either in connection with their daily preparation or with other research projects, we tried to leave them some free time. Since none of them had been to Columbia, however our English faculty were available to show them places of interest in the area, to arrange for them to meet some of the professors at the University of South Carolina, and to entertain them in their homes when time was available.

Although the students thought there was not enough in-depth study of the materials, I do not feel that that was a weakness at all. Actually a workshop should provide learning situations, methodology, and materials. This workshop provided some good reading lists, some suggestions for non-book material (not enough I feel), the expertise of specialists in the area, and good class discussion of a number of works rather than an in-depth study of one or two. These aspects were strengths of the program in my view.

It is hard to say what other programs and additions to the curriculum will develop on our campus from this. Since we have a professor in the Department of Religion who is very much interested in Native American culture and who has done extensive travel and study in connection with his interest, it is possible that he and I, along with a professor in the Sociology Department, may develop some further programs in Native American Studies. This is only in the early discussion stages.

I personally have noted the addition of more minority literature

in reputable new American literature anthologies. As a result I have added several writers to the course I teach. At present, most of these are black writers. I hope that the texts will include more writers from other minority groups.

The students are still talking with enthusiasm about the summer experience. I know that they have a better appreciation of these minority cultures and of their literatures. However, time alone will tell how much difference the workshop will make in their further study in these literatures and in the practical application what they have learned.

The planning and execution of the entire program required a great deal of time and hard work. As coordinator, I received complete cooperation from my department chairman and from the college administration. I also received a great deal of help and encouragement from John Hague of the National American Studies Faculty. The enthusiastic response of the program and of the students attest to the success of the program. Working with the NCTE Spring Institute in Minority Literature, prior to the summer workshop, whetted my appetite for more opportunities to work in these areas, and I sincerely hope our summer workshop has done the same for those who participated.